

the original pyramids of the town, some carrying the carvings of the natives in the stone. Since the discovery of the pyramids in the hill, horizontal and vertical tunneling has been dug which reveal to the onlooker something to behold and to be awed with. When there be sure to see the ancient burial compound, climb up to the church—the view is impressive and one will also be impressed by seeing a church full of people. Considering the fact that there are countless accessible churches in town without the need to undertake this truly high climb, why should the natives deem that worshipping God the “hard way” is THE way? It is something beyond our reckoning.



THE CATHEDRAL OF MEXICO CITY

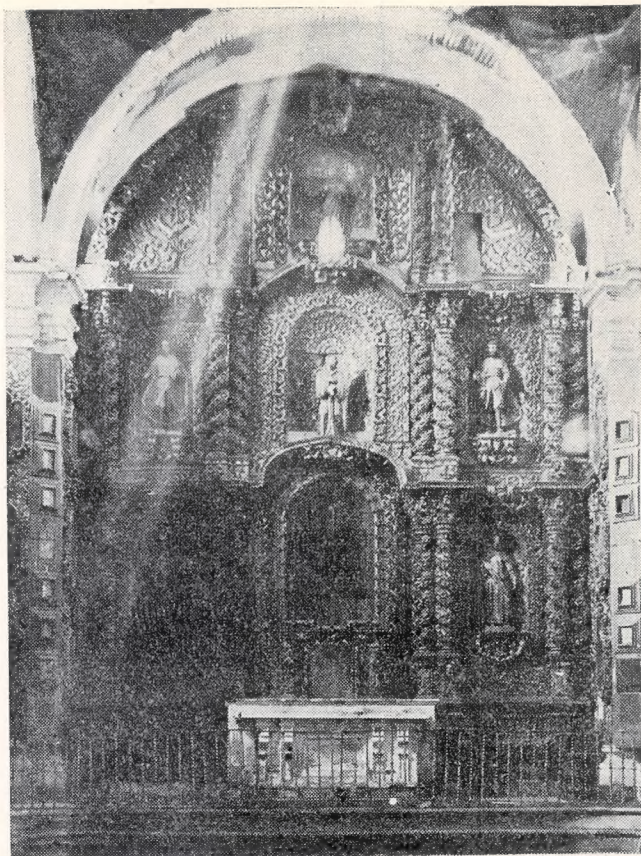
The cathedral was built on the spot of and with the stones taken from an Aztec temple. Around the corner from the cathedral there are still many Aztec ruins. The immensity of this and other cathedrals in the cities of Mexico is beyond our picturization. There are easily over a dozen churches in each edifice, as the niches are of church size while the central Nave is called the “Temple”. Each niche has elaborate altars with Masses being conducted simultaneously. In spite of the importance of this cathedral, it too suffered heavily all the restrictions of the reformation, only now is it being slowly restored. This is the “Zocalo”, civic center of Mexico City.

(Picture by Chester Buchanan)

Churches: Past Evils — Present Sorrows

Things constantly seen in Mexico: cute, but bold, burros; cacti; pyramids and churches. Graceful church steeples dominate the panorama and the horizon. Even in their ruined state (and there are plenty ruined churches in Mexico) they are the things of majesty and beauty. One can barely imagine all the wormanship and ingenuity that went into the building of a church or of the inside niches and altar frontals. The elaborateness of detail and beauty of work is beyond our ken to comprehend. Then they all contain religious masterpieces in the form of paintings and statuary, particularly such places as the Cathedrals of Guadalajara, Mexico City, Puebla, etc.

Many of these monumental beauties are in a sad state of affairs. The revolution and the period of reformation and persecution during the '20's have played particular havoc on the Catholic Churches. Many edifices,



AN ALTAR AT TLAXCALA

Tlaxcala once boasted of a huge monastery, San Francisco. The Tlaxcalans were once very powerful and they were the dread of the Aztecs. It was the Tlaxcalans who chased the Aztecs to the territory now the state of Mexico and the federal district. It was the Tlaxcalans and their Malinche who were responsible for the defeat of Montezuma and his Aztecs. If not for them Cortez and his Spaniards would have been pushed back into the sea. This church contains the first Corpus Christi (Body of Christ as seen on the cross) in Mexico. It is made of corn (elote) paste, and even tho it is human-size, being of corn paste, it is light in weight. Many of the older statuary of Mexico are made of elote, vestiges of pre-Cortesian periods, when during wars the Indians were wont to take their gods along while escaping and thus they were not burdened by weight.

The altar pieces of this church composed of many sub-churches, are most elaborate. The altar seen above is of a side church (niche) within the temple and is composed of three elaborate altars, each of three distinct styles; Florentine (above), baroque and Byzantine. This church, along with many others, suffered heavily during the reformation and still is a ruin. Many sacred pictures are slashed and profaned, many were robbed or taken to museums. Parts of the buildings are torn up while the monastery part itself is used by soldiers as barracks. This church, too, as of this year, is being slowly restored with very meager means.

regardless of their architectural beauty, priceless of the art work, were wantonly destroyed with sadistic vandalism. Many have been converted into gages, museums, theatres and stinking market places. Even churches which did escape the axes and slashing knives of vandals, have received no personal care in many generations. It is just of very late that renovations are taking place even of such noted places as the Cathedral of Mex-

ico City, the Shrine of Los Remedios and all others. The Mexican people are becoming bolder and are undergoing a surge of “Volver al Cristo” (Return to Christ), strengthened by the public opinion expressed by the North American Catholics and the desire to please tourists who are always visiting, of all things, the churches. Convents are still prohibited; a priest or a nun may not be seen publicly in their religious habits. Parochial schools are cropping up in half ruined, windowless and fire-trap like buildings, the remains of former strongholds of Catholic learning. The government is becoming more lenient and deems it as no crime when some or any anti-Catholic law is broken; even a church procession is held every once in a great while.

One wonders, with the Mexican people being so devoutly Catholic, what has brought on this condition of extreme anti-Catholicity? It is an old story which we often encounter in the Old Testament days; it was a bone of contention among the Pravoslavs (Russian Orthodox) and its crops up among the present day church leaders. God set down commandments, but when things go well, those who take upon themselves to preach His tenets, forget God. The priesthood of the upper hierarchy of Spain and Mexico of generations back, lead royal lives. Their riches and well being became the focal point of dissenters, reformists and revolutionists. Tho some priests were the servants of God and pastors of the people, feeling the want and need of the people, others of the past generations, were never with them. They were against the masses and in “cohoots” with the oppressive elements, be with the tsars or invading rulers. After Spain invaded Mexico and its people converted to Christianity through fire and sword, the Indian population was still not made an equal even tho both were now Christian; on the contrary, they were enslaved and received no consideration. During the revolution for independence from Spain (1810) and during the uprising against Maximilian and European powers (1867), except for a handful of priests, the bishops and all others were against the people and with the oppressors. The people won and heads were rolling. That does not excuse wanton destruction of priceless and irreplaceable art treasures, be it form of churches, paintings, statuary, wood carving, etc. But in times of upheaval no one thinks straight and no one reasons.

Aztec, Toltec, Zapotec, etc. religions might not have been good, but as far as the subjugated peoples were concerned the new religion was worse in its cruelty to the native and indigenous population. They saw their leaders and rulers slain, their cities burned, their civilization and temples destroyed while they themselves were degraded.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

In 1531, the Virgin appeared to a lowly peon, Juan Diego. This particular apparition was a turning point in Mexican life and in their prestige as a people. It is because of this incident that the shrine at Guadalupe is not merely a shrine to a Catholic saint but a National shrine of the Mexicans.

For many years the “conquistadors” ruled over the Mexicans with an iron hand, deeming them as creatures without souls and unworthy of any consideration, fit to exist solely for servitude of the then “Superior and ruling race” as the Spaniard thought himself to be. And the Blessed Mother chose to appear before a humble peon, calling him “son” and choosing him as a messenger to the Bishop that he build a Cathedral on the site of the apparition. Juan Diego ran to the bishop to con-



N^{ra} S^{ra} DE GUADALUPE DE MEXICO



OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

The central picturization is as She appeared on the Tipona, now enshrined in the church pictured below in a pure gold frame and topped by an elaborate pure gold crown. The side drawings depict the four apparitions to the lowly peon Juan Diego. The church in the picture is at the foot of the hill and the main worshipping is done here. High on the hill of Tepeyac, behind the church, is another large shrine marking the site of the apparition.

vey the message but neither the bishop nor Juan's own people believed him, for to them it was an impossibility that so holy a personage should make a personal appearance to a Mexican which would put him on the same footing with Spaniards. The Bishop D. Fra Juan De Zumarraga justly demanded proof which Diego could not produce. Dejectedly he walked back and while passing the hill of apparition, the Virgin once again appeared. Juan related the rebuff he had met and the request for proof. The Madonna told him to climb the barren rock of Tepeyac to gather the roses which he would find there, and to take them to the bishop as proof. He did find there roses where no vegetation whatsoever grew.